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# MESMERIC

EXPERIMENTS AT PUBLIC LECTURES

ARE LITTLE TO BE DEPENDED UPON.

STRIKINGLY EVIDENCED BY A RECENT EXAMPLE

AT MAIDSTONE.

BY SAMUEL SPURRELL.

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[1843]

# MESMERIC EXPERIMENTS,

&c.

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THESE remarks have been induced by an *anonymous* article in the *Maidstone Journal* of the 11th ult., entitled,

“REFUTATION OF MESMERIC MIRACLES.”

Feeling it to be an incumbent duty, as a candid investigator of the truth, and for the interests of science itself, to disabuse the public as to its contents, I proceed to do so. The article purports to be a palaver of J. Q. Rumball, Esq. who has recently been reading lectures here, for the purpose, he announced, of disproving Mesmerism *by Phrenology*, by proving the science to be an imposture, and most of its operators deluders.

In reference to Mr. Rumball's previous quarrels with the Mesmerists we have nothing to do, or only so, inasmuch as the Lecturer availed himself of the circumstance as an excuse for answering questions, *ONLY* from persons not connected with the Mesmerists. No serious inquirer after the truth, no candid investigator of the pretensions of any science, shrinks from its investigation through the hands of the professors of the art because some previous bickerings may have taken place between them.

If the Lecturer really made use of the vulgar and coarse abuse, both of Mesmerism and of the Mesmerists, here imputed to him,—proh pudor !——Lecturer——“ Who for an instant (for instance)



could believe that any one could tell what o'clock it was with his eyes shut? He should like to see it done; and he would not hesitate to offer to any one who could accomplish it, the whole proceeds of that evening's lecture." The challenge was accepted; "when immediately the operator mounted the platform with his patient, an intelligent looking youth, apparently about 14 or 15 years of age, and prepared to commence operations." After a few trivial remarks, not worth noticing, the Lecturer said,—“He had made the challenge, and would adhere to it! but he would submit, that if the lad could see the time by the watch once, he could see it as well twice or thrice, and therefore he thought it fair, for the satisfaction of the company, that the boy should make the experiment three times.” Not to occupy too much time, I shall confine myself to the principal, the *watch* experiment, which, under the MANAGEMENT of its directors, it was utterly impossible for it to have succeeded. There have been many watch-experiments made, both here and elsewhere, when those subjected to *pleno*-mesmerism have actually told the time to fractions of a minute; the same of time-pieces and clocks in different parts of the house, and in distant parts of a town. But there are peculiarities attending this vaunted experimental failure exhibited to us upon the show-boards of our redoubtable Lecturer, which prove to demonstration, that neither the truth, nor the success, of the science of Mesmerism is implicated in its failure. As the accustomed *modus operandi* was not abided by, but a line of conduct substituted for it, which could have terminated no otherwise than it did, in a total failure, I shall quote the most important of the successive movements made during the experiment, as exhibited to us in the article.

1st. By the operator. I conclude the patient was declared to be in a proper state. Now, had he really been so, had the boy been *pleno*-mesmerised, or subjected to the mesmeric trance, as the operator announced, and no doubt imagined, it is impossible

the results that followed should have taken place ; for no sooner had the watch been placed in his hands, than more or less violent convulsive twitches would have ensued, the usual accompaniment even to slight applications of metal to those subjected to the mesmeric trance. I saw a mesmerised subject touched with a shilling only, which instantly produced a convulsive twitch ; others have been equally affected, without the metal coming in *actual contact* ; different subjects, however, are differently affected ; some more, some less. Had the boy been *pleno*-mesmerised on this occasion, violent convulsions would probably have ensued, as often happens, and of this we have physical demonstration from experience.\* The boy had not been *pleno*-mesmerised. You will probably ask why ? —The operator undauntingly accepted the challenge ! I will tell you ; it was morally impossible, under the accompaniments, for him to have succeeded in inducing the mesmeric trance. Consider yourself mounted upon the Lecturer's show-board, with the operator and his patient, together with the denouncer of the rank cheats, surrounded by his auxiliaries, all of whom were within the sphere of magnetic attraction, drawing off the energy previously imparted to the patient : under the circumstances, how could the experiment have proved otherwise than a total failure ? If our phrenological champion has been always so entranced in his favourite study, as never to have heard of new discoveries having been made in other sciences, I can tell him, that above half a century ago, at lectures in the metropolis upon this very subject

\* The pages of the " Phreno-Magnet," a periodical replete with valuable information, are crowded with examples of the dangerous results of the contact of *metals* to the *pleno*-mesmerised ; and also of the nullifying effects, both to operators and their patients, of persons crowding around them ; or of crowded audiences in *confined* space, where the susceptibility to magnetic influences in great measure, if not wholly, ceases.

Vide—The recent case of *Aleais* at Paris—E. Lec's Appendix, p. 29.

of animal magnetism, (it having been a short time before ascertained) it was *there* announced, that an effluvia is ever emanating from all human bodies to the distance of from 9 to 12 feet, even in some cases more, forming a surrounding atmosphere of its own to each individual, and that every *fresh* subject coming within its limits would powerfully draw off the magnetic power, or energy, previously residing in the operator, and equally so of that imparted to the patient. In addition to this, a metal watch was put into his hands, and *that alone*, had he been really *pleno*-mesmerised, would GENERALLY, by throwing him into convulsions, have incapacitated him from making the accustomed mesmeric disclosures.

Come down from that vanity show-board, Mr. Lecturer, and let us meet you upon the solid ground; when the first striking object I see before me, is the rather awkward dilemma into which you have brought yourself. One of two things is certain—either you are as entirely ignorant of the science of Mesmerism, and of the effects produced by the established *modus operandi* of mesmeric operators, as the boards upon which you stand; or, as a candid investigator of the truth, a lover of fair dealing at experiments, you would instantly have put a veto upon the proceeding, by having it announced, that the boy must be re-mesmerized to make it a *fair* experiment.

Moreover, you would have directed all spectators to be kept beyond the limits of the personal atmosphere surrounding every individual; as, otherwise, the efficacy of the imparted energy would be materially weakened, if not wholly lost. Either the profound ignorance of the Lecturer, as to the necessary consequence of the line of conduct pursued, that it inevitably must have nullified the experiment, or his more culpable neglect, (if he really had any knowledge of the subject) in not having immediately stopped the procedure, place him upon the horns of a dilemma: grasp whichever he will—in the one case, his ostentatious boastings of eclipsing the Mesmerists by



his assumed *ultra*-vision, he becomes the well-merited object of derision ; or, in the other, of our superlative contempt, for his disingenuousness.

His subsequent palaver of the operator, who is well known to be a most respectable young man, could be viewed by no person of the slightest *penetration* otherwise than as meant to make game of him. Farther, his doing so at the expense of the poor boy, who from his youth was unable to defend himself from his aspersions, and who, whatever deception had been practised, it had not been by him, was in the highest degree derogatory, not merely to the Lecturer, but to the MAN. Lecturer goes on—"As to his patient (the operator's subject) he would not be severe upon him ; he would not say he was guilty of any thing beyond a boyish trick, for which the administration of a little horsewhip castigation would probably prove very wholesome." You insinuate, it is your *pet* fancy, that the boy was not guilty of any thing beyond a boyish trick. It is mine, that the whole conduct and management of the affair was a MAN trick. The miserable shift you was at length driven to, to disparage Mesmerism, is a clinching proof of your total incapacity and want of discrimination, when you say that, "as much could be effected WITHOUT, as was ever *pretended* to be done by Mesmerism ; for instance, that the most severe surgical operations had been performed without patients exhibiting the slightest suffering." We neither wanted a ghost, nor J. Q. Rumball, Esq. to have told us this, since it was known a thousand years, or so, before our itinerant Lecturer was born. To substantiate his position, he should have favoured us with a register of the severest surgical operations in all ages, where the patients had not merely submitted to them without flinching, but had been *wholly insensible to their having been performed until told of it after the operation was over*. Such are not the *pretensions* of Mesmerism, but practical results to those who have undergone severe surgical operations under the



mesmeric trance, or when *pleno*-mesmerised. Limbs have been taken off, and teeth extracted, without the patients knowing of it at the time, together with the breast case by M. Cloquet, one of the first surgeons in Paris.\* The concluding mountebank pranks, and legerdemain tricks, attempted to be played off on the audience, as a finale, by the family connexions, aided by himself, of this self-plumed denouncer of Mesmerism as an imposture, and its professors as "rank cheats," has disgraced, not merely the showman, but has at the same time cast a slur upon the profession of Lecturers for ever.

My first knowledge of J. Q. Rumball, Esq. was derived from seeing his prospectus placarded in the shop-windows here. Looking at one of them, and just as I had finished it, a friend passing, asked what I had been looking at? I replied,—“ You have a Phrenological Lecturer of high pretensions, according to his own announcement, at hand, and who, among other extraordinary feats to be performed, undertakes not merely to disprove Mesmerism by Phrenology, but farther, to prove that most mesmeric operators and ALL their patients are rank cheats. Depend upon it the denunciation of Mesmerism is a mere revenue catch, to entrap the unwary, and to thereby extract what money he can from their pockets. Phrenological Lectures of *themselves* have long been too hacknied and stale to fill the pockets of lecturers, unless some ostensible LURE be held out. Without this, audiences would frequently depart without having so much as warmed the seats of the lecturers' benches, and in the refined phraseology of the *Rumball* school, they would prove ‘ NO GO!’ ”

SAMUEL SPURRELL.

I have appended my signature, to silence all suspicions of disingenuousness in not having done so.

\* Edwin Lee. See Appendix to 3rd edition of Animal Magnetism

P.S. The putting the watch into the hands of the boy at all is a very suspicious circumstance, being wholly *unnecessary* in experiments of the kind. Had the watch been in the pocket of any one in the back seats, the intervening throug would not have prevented him telling the true time. This I know from personal experience. The consummate ignorance of the Lecturer in not knowing this, and that a watch, or any metallic substance of that magnitude, put into the hands of the *pleno*-mesmerised, would GENERALLY of *itself* defeat the experiment altogether, renders him a subject of our pity, that a man making pretensions to high attainments, should have so disgraced himself, as to have *denounced* any other science of which he knew nothing; or, if he sinned against his better knowledge, by suffering the experiment to go on, which he knew must fail, for the sake of an *imaginary triumph*, for it was no *real* one, our language is wholly defective in not furnishing us with terms sufficiently significant for the purpose, of expressing our disgust and abhorrence of his conduct.

That I have not erred, in celebrating Mr. Rumball's high mountebank attainments is clear, since in a periodical of extensive circulation, and of the present month, we find the following among the list of its contents—

“MR. RUMBALL TURNED MOUNTEBANK.”





